



'Successful' Local and Metropolitan Government Models Elsewhere: Potential Lessons for Perth?

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Introduction

Is local government in Perth ready to take on the complex challenges of the 21st century? How does it weigh against political governance models of broadly comparable city-regions elsewhere? The current debate on local government reform in Western Australia, which too quickly became a debate about boundaries, can be informed and enriched by a closer look at structure, functions and issues of apparently 'successful' local government models in other jurisdictions. Based on analysing secondary data obtained through a review of the international academic and policy literature as well as relevant websites and census data, this paper explores the political governance arrangements in five city-regions in three countries, and attempts to draw lesson for effective local government restructuring in Perth. Importantly, the paper does not suggest the adoption of a particular model, but rather aims to highlight the potential benefits and problems associated with each of the five models in a context-sensitive fashion. This approach allows for the development of a wider range of options for local government reform in Perth. Emphasis has been placed on the possibility of incorporating a metropolitan-wide layer of representation in new governance structures for Western Australia's capital, or in other words, decision-making structures that would have a role for the city-region as a whole.

The five city-regions analysed share many societal, political and institutional characteristics with Perth, while at the same time being recognized among academics and policymakers for proactive, progressive and effective solutions to governing their jurisdictions.

- *London*, United Kingdom (country capital), has been chosen as an example of an innovative local government model that seems to respond well to the particular and severe challenges of a 'global city'. Furthermore, London has roughly the same number of local councils (i.e. 33 borough councils) as Perth but is overlaid by a democratically elected form of governance – the Greater London Authority.
- *Vancouver*, Canada (provincial capital), located in the Province of British Columbia, can be viewed as a metropolitan region comparable to Perth in terms of colonial history, culture, size and in terms of its gateway role in the provincial and national economies. It is also widely regarded as both a successful model of



local political governance and a place which offers a very high quality of life for its people (Mercer, 2009; Economist Intelligence Unit 2010).

- *Montreal*, Canada (provincial capital), the capital of the French-speaking Province of Quebec, has been chosen because it created relative recently a region-wide planning, coordinating and funding structure that, among other issues, has to grapple with the particular challenges of a linguistically and culturally separated local population.
- *Auckland*, New Zealand, a metropolitan region similar to Perth in terms of colonial history, culture and language, size and economic gateway function for the rest of country, is interesting as it is currently undergoing far-reaching local government reform as a firm response to deeply entrenched local parochialism and political antagonism and in order to be able to compete more effectively in the face of ever-increasing globalisation (Wetzstein, 2007).
- *Brisbane*, Australia (state capital of Queensland), is similar to Perth in terms of being a resources hub as well as facing severe growth pressures. It is widely perceived as a local government model that is efficient and effective in service delivery, strategic planning and attraction of people and businesses.

It should also be noted that four of these city-regions are faced with the challenges of incorporating meaningful engagement and representation of indigenous/First Nations people. The five models are now discussed in more detail.

Metropolitan and Local Governance Elsewhere: Five Examples

London - Democratically Elected Supra-Metropolitan Governance

In the context of a strongly centralised two tier government system (local and central government) in the United Kingdom, the Greater London Authority (GLA) - established in 1999 - is the metropolitan-wide governing body for London. It consists of a directly-elected executive Mayor of London, currently Boris Johnson (Conservative Party), and an elected 25-member London Assembly with scrutiny powers. The GLA is responsible for the strategic administration of the 1579 km² of Greater London. A unique governance model in the United Kingdom, its key role is to coordinate strategy, policy and service delivery across London's vast metropolitan region. It shares local government powers with the councils of 32 London boroughs and the City of London Corporation. The Mayor



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and the GLA essentially have responsibility for five key policy areas: transport, policing, fire and rescue, development, and strategic planning. Under the GLA umbrella there also exist four functional bodies: Transport for London, the Metropolitan Police Authority, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, and the London Development Agency. The Greater London Authority is mostly funded by direct government grant, with some money collected with local Council tax. The GLA has received broad attention for the introduction of a congestion charge, a fee for motorists travelling within the inner city traffic area in London. While revenues to the Transport for London body have been modest in comparison to government grants and fares, there have been positive effects of the congestion charge on lowering traffic levels and increasing use of public transport.

Early evaluations of the work of the GLA are mixed. Sweeting (2003), for example, has argued that the Mayor of London is 'strong' within the Greater London Authority, but 'weak' in formal terms in the governance of London as the position has limited local autonomy, is heavily reliant on central government funding, has no direct political party connections, and as yet has not harnessed latent governmental or nongovernmental capacity in London. Furthermore, according to Hambleton and Sweeting (2004), the creation of the GLA is part of a new political management model that aims to modernize local governance by strengthening local leadership, streamlining decision making and enhancing local accountability. In this sense, the London model mimics experiences in major US cities where the City Mayor plays a pivotal role in policy leadership, innovation and collaboration in efforts to revitalise and rebrand cities largely through economic and cultural policy developments.

Vancouver (Canada) - Inter-Municipal Governing Body I

In the Canadian context of a three tier-governmental hierarchy (similar to Australia), Metro Vancouver is the inter-municipal governing body of the Greater Vancouver Regional District. This federated body is made up of 22 municipalities, one electoral area, and one treaty First Nation (representation of the indigenous people), and is charged with central aspects of governance for the metropolitan area surrounding, and including, the city of Vancouver. Member municipalities are represented by 35 Directors on the basis of one director for every 100,000 people. The principal function of Metro Vancouver is to administer resources and services which are common across the metropolitan area. These include community planning, water, sewage, drainage, housing, transportation, air quality and parks. The funding sources for Metro Vancouver consist of user fees (water, sewer, solid waste), property tax (parks, planning, air quality) and support from its social housing stock.



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In policy circles around the world, Vancouver today is generally perceived as a well governed jurisdiction, and a place committed to balancing economic with social and environmental goals. It can be claimed that governance structures and practices have contributed to desirable outcomes such as world-class quality of life ratings (Mercer, 2009; Economist Intelligence Unit 2010) and a good public transport system. Vancouver was also successful in its bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics, an event that is expected to provide a further significant boost to the regional economy and its global visibility. However, there is anecdotal evidence of persistent social issues such as a relatively large number of homeless people 'living' in the city's Central Business District; and problems of housing affordability.

Montreal (Canada) - Inter-Municipal Governing Body II

The key *regional* entity for governing Greater Montreal (Province Quebec) is the *Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal* (CMM/English: Montreal Metropolitan Community, or MMC). Since 2001, the MMC has functioned as a planning, coordinating and funding body serving 82 municipalities. It is in charge of planning, coordinating, and financing economic development, public transportation, garbage collection and waste management across the metropolitan area of Montreal. The MMC is largely funded by the contributions it collects from its member municipalities according to their respective tax bases, with the exception of amounts related to specifically priced or otherwise regulated services. Within Greater Montreal, there is also the city-wide governing entity of the Montreal Agglomeration Council (MAC), which came into existence in 2006. This democratically elected structure is headed by the Mayor of Montréal and consists of 31 elected officials representing all the municipalities on the island of Montréal.

With new city and regional governance arrangements being introduced relatively recently, the jury is still out on the question of success. What makes Montreal unique among North American city-regions however – according to Fischler and Wolfe (2000) – is the fact that it has both an English and French speaking population, and more specifically, the relative decline of the Francophone population on the island of Montreal. Therefore, any evaluation of local government restructuring in the Quebec region must take into account the sensitivities and politics behind the linguistic and cultural separation between the Anglophone and Francophone population groups.

Auckland (New Zealand) - Unitary Council

In New Zealand's two-tier government system, made up of central government and local government consisting of local city/district councils as well as overlying regional councils, the governance of



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Auckland has been seen as problematic for a long time. It has been described as parochial, fragmented and antagonistic (Bush, 1977), and has been increasingly perceived as a potential threat to the political authority of central government based on population size and economic power. Following subsequent waves of local government consolidation throughout the 20th century, in 2007 a Royal Commission on Auckland's governance (set up by the former Labour-led central government) explored ways of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of Auckland's current 8 council-strong political governance structures. In short, the Royal Commission recommended the establishment of a single unitary authority for the Auckland city-region.

In essence, the new system for Auckland combines elements of the London and US-cities models as well as the Vancouver structure in that there is to be a democratically elected mayor with the strategic authority for the city-region's development, a 20 councilor-strong local council, 20 – 30 Local Boards across the Auckland region made up of approximately 125–150 local board members, and representation of Maori (New Zealand's indigenous people) if there is community support.

The key reason for central government's radical overhaul of Auckland's governance landscape was the fact that decision-making was too fragmentary and weak resulting in sub-optimal resource allocation and missed local and global investment opportunities (New Zealand Government, 2009). The rather radical move to introduce a unitary council with a region-wide elected mayor comes somewhat as a surprise as the strong position of Auckland in New Zealand, based on population and economy shares, will give a directly elected mayor strong political power in national politics, and thus potentially challenge the political control of central government.

Brisbane (Australia) – Unitary Council

Unlike other Australian capital cities, a large portion of the greater metropolitan area of Brisbane is controlled by a single local government entity, the Brisbane City Council. Established in 1924, it is Australia's largest local government body in terms of population and budget, has jurisdiction over an area of 1,367 km², its annual budget is approximately \$1.6 billion, and it has an asset base of \$13 billion. The City of Brisbane is divided into 26 wards, with each ward electing a Councilor as their community representative. The Lord Mayor of Brisbane and Councilors are elected every four years by popular vote, in which all residents must participate.

The seven standing committees drawn from the membership of Council are the Community Services Committee, Environment and Sustainability Committee, Finance Committee, Public Transport Committee, Roads,



TransApex and Traffic Committee, Urban Planning and Economic Development Committee, and the Water and City Businesses Committee.

According to McKinlay Douglas (2006), the city is:

“regarded as a successful example of a metropolitan administration being effective to manage a very substantial undertaking serving a large population. It does not, however, follow that Brisbane's current success as a metropolitan administration is evidence to justify the amalgamation, today, of several large local authorities to create an equivalent sized metropolitan administration” (p.24/25).

Whilst McKinlay Douglas concedes that Brisbane provides an instructive example of apparently effective management of a large metropolitan area under a single administration, he also stresses that the nature of modern metropolitan administration is very different from what it was in 1924; namely the complexity of infrastructure requirements, the nature of technology and the local authority funding environment.

The local government structures and the key characteristics of the five presented case-studies are shown in summary in Table 1. The paper now shifts attention to the local government context in Perth.



Table 1: Summary Comparison of Five Local Government Structures

City-Region	London	Vancouver	Montreal	Auckland	Brisbane
Population (m)	7.5 (2006)	2.2 (2007)	3.6 (2006)	1.4 (2006)	1.9 (2008)
State-System	2-tier	3-tier	3-tier	2-tier	3-tier
Regional governance structure/s	Greater London Authority	Metro Vancouver	Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC); Montreal Agglomeration Council (MAC)	Auckland Council	Brisbane City Council
Date established	2000	1967	2001	2010	1924
Local Government Model	<i>Democratically Elected Supra-Metropolitan Governance</i> Directly elected Mayor plus Local Assembly plus 32 London boroughs + City of London	<i>Inter-Municipal Governing Body</i> Inter-municipal governing body (22 municipalities, 1 electoral area, and 1 treaty First Nation)	<i>Inter-Municipal Governing Body</i> MMC- Inter-municipal governing body (19 boroughs; president is mayor of Montreal); MAC-supra-municipal entity	<i>Unitary Council</i> Directly elected Mayor, 1 council, 20-30 boards	<i>Unitary Council</i> Directly elected Mayor, 1 council, 26 wards
Pros	Strong internal leadership	Inclusive decision-making; evolving structures	Inclusive decision-making; evolving structures	Centralised decision-making; Economies of scale	Centralised decision-making; Economies of scale
Cons	Weak external leadership	Perhaps perceived as too bureaucratic	Perhaps perceived as too bureaucratic	Perhaps limited community input	Perhaps limited community input

Source: Author

The Local Government Context in Perth

Perth is the capital and largest city of the Australian state of Western Australia. With a population of 1,650,000 (2009), Perth ranks fourth amongst the nation's cities, with a growth rate consistently above the national average. Importantly, more than three quarters of all Western Australians live in the capital, a situation that gives the city-region strong economic and political power. By virtue of its population and role as the administrative centre for business and government, Perth dominates the Western Australian economy, despite the major mining, petroleum and agricultural export industries located elsewhere in the state. A recently published FACTBase bulletin (Tonts and Taylor, 2009) positions Perth in 3rd place behind Sydney and Melbourne in terms of corporate representation in Australia.

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Perth's function as the State's capital city, its economic base and population size have also created development opportunities for many other businesses oriented to local or more diversified markets. While services to the mining and resource industries play a key role in Perth, its economy has been changing in favour of the local consumption-related service industries such as wholesale and retail since the 1950s.

Local government in Perth has a long and proud history. It grew out of locally-elected Road Boards, but, over time, functions and powers were increasingly given to its municipalities. In 1949, the Local Government Department was formed to guide councils and to audit their accounts. The Local Government Act 1995 provides general competence powers to local governments, allowing them to undertake functions that previously would not have been permitted without Ministerial and other approvals. Today, 30 of the state's 142 local governments are located in the Perth metropolitan area (see Table 2).

Perth's governance is characterised by the existence of many small to medium-sized local councils in population terms, and by the absence of formal and informal metropolitan-wide governance structures. Councils have wide powers and responsibilities, including the provision and maintenance of streets, footpaths and drainage, rubbish removal, street lighting, facilities and play grounds, but may also incorporate strategic functions such as public transport services and town revitalisation. There are several sub-metropolitan partnerships between groups of local government entities that agree to collaborate on matters of common interest in Perth - the so-called Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs). Examples of these ROC's include the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (City of Bayswater, City of Belmont, City of Swan, Shire of Kalamunda, Shire of Mundaring, Town of Bassendean) and the South-West Group (City of Cockburn, City of Fremantle, City of Melville, City of Rockingham, Town of East Fremantle, Town of Kwinana).

Table 2 provides an overview of local councils in the Perth metropolitan region. Councils differ widely in regards to area and population size, councilors per head of population, and revenue. The Shire of Peppermint Grove is the smallest local council in Australia covering an area of 1.5 km² and a population of 1652 residents. This results in a 'councilor per head of population' ratio of 184. In contrast, the City of Stirling (100 km²), the largest council in the Perth Metropolitan area, has a population of more than 188000, which means that there is only one councilor for every 11805 people. Interestingly, the socio-economic differences between these two local government entities mean that Peppermint Grove achieves revenue of more than \$4400 per head of population, whereas Stirling only takes in around \$800 per resident (19 % of the Peppermint Grove revenue share). Other larger councils by population size include the City of Joondalup (160 000 people), the City of Wanneroo



(124 000) and the City of Swan (102 000). Conversely, the Town of East Fremantle (6700), the Town of Cottesloe (7000) and the Town of Mosman Park (8200) are the smallest councils besides Peppermint Grove. In sum, despite similarities of historical, cultural and political trajectories, the combination of a multitude of local government entities and their unevenness in terms of size and resource base, and the absence of metropolitan-wide governance arrangements, distinguish the city-region of Perth from the five previously presented case-studies.

Table 2: Perth Metropolitan Council Statistics

Council	Number of Councilors (total/per head of pop)	Area km ²	Population	Number of Electors	Total Rates Levied (in Mil \$)	Grants & subsidies (in Mil \$)	Total Revenue (in Mil \$)
City of Armadale	16/3480	560,4	55,685	34,896	23,9	3,2	54,3
Town of Bassendean	11/1288	11	14,166	9,770	7,6	2,7	13,8
City of Bayswater	13/4292	32,7	55,801	40,646	22,6	4,9	42,3
City of Belmont	13/2523	40	32,794	17,015	23,5	1,4	36,3
Town of Cambridge	10/2540	22	25,400	17,065	14,0	1,5	39,0
City of Canning	12/6342	65,4	76,100	49,325	32,9	13,1	75,5
Town of Claremont	11/864	4,9	9,504	6,582	7,3	0,9	23,4
City of Cockburn	10/8200	148	82,000	51,000	36,0	6,0	77,7
Town of Cottesloe	12/589	4	7,066	5,076	5,6	1,1	10,4
Town of East Fremantle	10/670	3,2	6,697	4,820	4,1	0,7	6,5
City of Fremantle	14/1774	18,9	24,835	18,826	22,0	5,1	51,6
City of Gosnells	15/6333	127	95,000	58,717	35,0	3,9	66,9
City of Joondalup	14/11429	99	160,000	102,000	56,1	8,4	86,9
Shire of Kalamunda	14/3740	349	52,360	34,598	16,9	4,6	27,5
Town of Kwinana	10/2540	118	25,397	14,129	17,2	4,2	56,0
City of Melville	14/7126	52,7	99,759	66,788	41,4	1,5	85,6
Town of Mosman Park	8/1027	4,3	8,214	5,543	5,5	0,3	8,4
Shire of Mundaring	14/2388	644	33,438	23,690	15,0	6,1	28,9
City of Nedlands	14/1561	20,6	21,851	14,397	13,9	1,7	21,4
Shire of Peppermint Grove	9/184	1,5	1,652	1,064	1,5	0,08	7,3
City of Perth	10/1349	8,8	13,486	10,514	47,7	2,3	123,0
City of Rockingham	12/8112	261	97,338	50,839	32,2	19,0	60,2
Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale	12/1333	905	16,000	9,254	6,7	2,4	15,6
City of South Perth	14/2929	20	41,000	23,522	19,4	1,7	43,3
City of Stirling	16/11805	100	188,881	125,692	78,5	864,7	156,1
City of Subiaco	14/1274	7,1	17,835	11,480	12,5	3,9	29,6
City of Swan	15/6829	1043	102,434	58,861	55,6	6,7	83,8
Town of Victoria Park	10/2874	17,9	28,738	18,105	20,6	1,8	28,2
Town of Vincent	10/2690	11,3	26,904	19,341	16,8	0,8	42,2
City of Wanneroo	16/7805	687,5	124,887	70,162	47,3	6,4	93,5
Totals	373	5388	1545,222	973,717	739,4	117,2	1,495,6

Source: The Western Australian Local Government Directory 2009



Learning the Lessons: Potential Local Government Models for Perth

Based on the insights of the five case studies as well as Perth’s particular local context, four models of metropolitan and local governance are now discussed in brief as potential options for current governance reform in Western Australia. This evaluation attempts to be balanced, and thus comments on both key strengths and weaknesses of each model are provided (see Table 3).

Table 3: Structural Options for Local Government Reform in Perth

<i>Model Number</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Model Type</i>	Unitary Council	Nominated Metropolitan Government	Elected Metropolitan Government	Voluntary Metropolitan Representation
<i>Model Details</i>	Unitary Council with boards/committees and directly elected mayor	Metropolitan government nominated from amalgamated councils	Directly elected metropolitan government plus amalgamated local councils	Voluntary metropolitan representation of amalgamated councils
<i>Similarity to Government Model elsewhere</i>	Brisbane Auckland (from 2010)	Vancouver Montreal	London	Auckland (until 2010)
<i>Pros</i>	Centralised decision-making; economies of scale; favourably perceived outside Perth and Australia	Action-focused; good articulation with other layers of government	Strength of position of directly elected mayor with representative role plus some decision-making powers	Democratic nature of governing arrangement (multi-actor buy-in needed)
<i>Cons</i>	Limited community input; exclusion of resource-poor election candidates	Lack of direct electoral mandate; relatively low public profile; reliance on powers above and political support from below	Potential for duplication between metropolitan council and State government agencies, political tensions between metropolitan council and powerful local councils	Lacking power of implementation, control and co-ordination; low effectiveness of decision-making

Source: Author

Model 1 : Unitary Council with boards/committees and directly elected mayor: In the unitary council model, similar to Brisbane and the new governance model for Auckland, underneath one council several special boards could be in charge of key services such as economic development, environmental protection, community development, infrastructure and transport, and planning and governance issues. This model would provide the benefits of centralised decision-making, economies of scale and potentially favourable perceptions of people, policy-makers and

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investors outside Perth and Australia. However, community input may be limited. The potentially very powerful position of a directly elected mayor for the Perth region (and thus possibly a threat to the Western Australia State government) would attract highly motivated and persuasive leaders, but probably exclude candidates who lack the financial resources for an effective election campaign. Taking into account the extreme population concentration of Western Australians in Perth and the associated power embedded in a single metropolitan leadership structure as well as the absence of severe economic growth problems for the State and the city-region that has in part driven comprehensive reform elsewhere, a radical change from currently 30 councils to 1 council cannot realistically be expected in a single step.

Model 2 – Metropolitan government nominated from amalgamated councils: The second model is basically the application of the Vancouver model. This governance structure seems to be quite successful in getting things done, including attracting major international events such as the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. It is basically about regional-scale coordination of planning, services and powers, and it has been given credit for its good articulation with other layers of government. Potential disadvantages are the lack of direct electoral mandate on the metropolitan level, the relatively low public profile and the reliance on powers from above and political support from below (consensus-building). Given the relatively similar institutional and economic context of Vancouver and Perth, this model should be given more thought and consideration in the current stage of the reform.

Model 3 – Directly elected metropolitan government plus amalgamated local councils: This governance arrangement would be similar to London's current political structure. It would consist of a combination of amalgamated councils with another layer of a metropolitan-wide operating metropolitan council. Importantly, the roles for each governance layer would have to be clearly defined. The metropolitan council, for example, could undertake the planning and provision of wider strategic and operational matters that need to be dealt with on this geographical scale. A directly elected mayor would have a representative role in addition to some decision-making powers, in combination with the metropolitan councilors on region-wide matters. This model would work best with some voluntary metropolitan representation of local councils in political and/or bureaucratic structures independent of the metropolitan council. While metropolitan governance would be improved, a clear disadvantage would be the potential for duplication between the metropolitan council and State government agencies, as well as political tensions between the metropolitan council and powerful local councils.



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Model 4 – Voluntary metropolitan representation of amalgamated councils: A last potential governance model for metropolitan Perth would be a mix of amalgamated councils (see three scenarios under model 3) with voluntary metropolitan representation. This model was used for Auckland in the 1990's and 2000's. The metropolitan leadership structures could be based on semi-informal or more formal arrangements, and should encompass both the elected leaders (mayors, potentially also councilors) and the bureaucratic sphere (council chief executives). In addition, senior managers and senior professionals could participate in metropolitan working groups around issues of both strategic and operational importance. The old Auckland model had limited success in terms of lobbying at Central Government level, but proved ineffective in internal conflict resolution without practical mechanism to resolve issues. This weakness partly triggered the comprehensive overhaul of the Auckland governance landscape in 2008/2009. Overall, this governance model emphasises voluntarism, co-operation and consensus-building, but must be regarded as lacking power of implementation, control and co-ordination. Thus, the effectiveness of the decision-making processes can be viewed as problematic.

For models 2 – 4, three specific options for amalgamating local councils deserve particular attention. A *2-council* scenario would be based on the perceived economic strengths of the city of Perth (corporate power, retail) and the city of Fremantle (trade, tourism). This dual model would be in alignment with general perceptions of the main centres of the Perth region amongst residents and visitors. It would give the elected mayors less power than in the unitary council, but could lead to political tensions between, for example, corporate politics in Perth and environmental politics in Fremantle. A *5-councils* scenario would work on the assumption that the Perth region consists of 5 main sub-centres: Metro-City, Metro-North, Metro-West, Metro-South and Metro-East. It is probably the ideal model for effective voluntary metropolitan structures and arrangements as described above as 5 councils seem a reasonable size to allow issues to be worked through collaboratively. This model would be in alignment with a planning emphasis on sub-regional centres and would considerably simplify the currently fragmented structures. Finally, a *10-15 council* scenario would work closely with the political realities of the current reform. Given the signals from the current State government, a (voluntary) reduction from 30 to 10-15 councils seems possible. It can be expected that service efficiency (economies of scale) would be the main driver for some councils to merge. On the downside, voluntary metropolitan structures would work with difficulty, as the number of councils would be too high to expect easy consensus decision-making.

Local Government Reform in Perth: Issues of Importance

In addition to developing potentially effective governance models for the city-region of Perth on the basis of local and metropolitan government structures established elsewhere, the author believes that more detailed lessons can be learned from these places. Several themes deserve particular consideration in this regard; there are outlined in brief below.

Democracy and community representation: Democratic inadequacies have been highlighted in Gleeson et al. (2010) as a particular serious issue in current Australian metropolitan governance systems. Local government reform must ensure democratic decision-making as well as community representation and participation. While the local government literature often emphasizes efficiency, McKinlay Douglas (2006, p.42) suggest that:

“in areas such as social capital, residential mobility, and localisation, community identity can be a very powerful force for gaining commitment in ways which cannot be achieved through purely instrumental means”.

Representing and responding to the needs of ever fragmented communities of interest is an important role for local government. In particular, and similar to the approaches in Vancouver and Auckland, the particular consultation and representation needs of the indigenous people of this city-region should be adequately recognised in process, structure and legislation.

Another key issue is the role of the directly elected mayor. Under this arrangement, mayors have significant executive powers including the powers of appointment and to intervene directly in the conduct of a city government, to veto the city’s budget and to initiate legislation. In contrast, the council-manager form of local government, comprising an elected council and professional city manager hired by the council to administer the government, gives fewer powers to the mayor. It has been suggested that the latter system affords less attention to citizen demands and concerns than do mayor-council systems, where such demands can be expressed more directly through the political process. The model of the directly elected mayor has been critiqued on the basis of leading to US-style election campaigns that favour wealthy individuals that can afford effective election campaigns. In sum, stronger metropolitan and/or bureaucratic structures must go hand in hand with the development and refinement of effective arrangements of local democracy.

Economies of scale: is bigger better? Proposed reforms to local government in Australia have often been prefaced by the assertion that ‘bigger is better’. It is claimed bigger councils will lead to more efficient



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and effective service delivery, enhance policy capacity and innovation and thus result in better outcomes for ratepayers. In this context, the literature on economies of scale in local government services (Dollery et al, 2004; Rouse and Putterill, 2005) reveals a general acceptance that there may be economies of scale within individual services, but that, service by service, these will arise at quite different scales of operation. Rather than economies of scale providing a rationale for amalgamation, the weight of evidence suggests both that larger authorities may be less efficient, and that the better means of seeking economies of scale is to evaluate on a service by service basis – whether through collaboration, joint ventures, outsourcing or other means.

Decision-making processes, leadership and policy/jurisdictional alignments: The 2009 Landcorp 2030 Summit on the future of Western Australia highlighted a perceived lack of leadership and a risk-averse attitude in both political and administrative circles. The question of leadership, which could be seen as the ability to sell unpopular but necessary policies, the capacity to build collaborative and partnership arrangements and/or the insertion of new ideas in the political and policy arenas, seems critical to the challenge of a relatively conservative culture in Perth. Local government restructuring offers the opportunity to create structures and processes for greater Perth to think and act more strategically in order to improve policy innovation and the level of leadership in political and administrative affairs. Overall, it seems paramount to have clear decision-making processes based on principles of accountability that are combined with structures that promote leadership and innovative policy approaches. The current reform process in Western Australia also opens up the opportunity to work towards better alignments of jurisdictional and policy boundaries between local government, and the State government and its bureaucratic apparatus. Increasing efficiencies can be expected by aligning the boundaries of local councils with those of state agencies in charge of, for example, health and education. One needs to keep in mind, however, that the Local Government Act is a creation of the State parliament, and it is therefore the State of Western Australia that, at the moment, ultimately holds the power within the state hierarchy.

Perceived contributions to 'global competitiveness': The international literature supports an argument that contemporary understandings of local government are changing markedly, driven by factors such as demographic change (with its implications for increasing national and international competition for skills), globalisation (with its national and international competition for quality capital investments, high-profile events and exporting of goods and services), and the growing recognition of the role of regions and city-regions in the globalising world. Successful local-global links and high global visibility are generally viewed as conducive to creating condition for a high quality of life in our cities. The



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current local government restructuring in Auckland, for example, is premised to a significant degree on the need to compete internationally for people and resources (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, 2008). In this regard it is important to keep in mind that while resource-rich Western Australia and its service centre Perth may be well-positioned internationally in the economic arena at the moment, this may not necessarily be the case for future generations.

Conclusion

Based on five case studies from Australia and overseas, this paper sought to develop potential structural solutions for more effective local and metropolitan government in Perth. In conclusion, it needs to be emphasised that the recognition of the particular institutional, political, legal, socio-economic and historical context is absolutely critical for successful local government reforms. In other words, simply copying other places apparent success models may not necessarily lead to successful outcomes in Perth. The establishment of the GLA in London, the Brisbane City Council and the Auckland Unitary Council highlights the importance of National and State government's leadership in setting up, and legislating for, new governance models for the dominant metropolitan regions within their jurisdictions. The more collaborative and bureaucratic Canadian examples, on the other hand, show that some success is possible by creating regional governance entities that overlap, and link, with traditionally evolved local government structures. What is possible, and desirable, for Perth, can only be determined through local political and policy processes guided by principles of democracy, communication and leadership. In this regard it is particularly important to identify the potential trade-off's between individuals as well as groups of people that any governance change entails, and to seek – as far as possible – a just distribution of gains and losses.

It is suggested that in order to effectively inform local debates, more empirically grounded research could be undertaken. These studies could engage with key stakeholders in these five cities to hear first-hand about both the success-stories and the hard lessons learnt on the way. In addition, this work could also provide a fuller picture about the nature and challenges of local government here in Perth. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to an informed and robust discussion on local government reform in the context of metropolitan Perth.

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For additional information on case studies see for example:

- www.london.gov.uk/assembly/london_assembly_members.jsp
- www.metrovancouver.org/about/Pages/default.aspx
- www.ville.montreal.qc.ca
- www.royalcommission.govt.nz
- www.brisbane.qld.gov.au

About FACTBase

The FACTBase project is a joint venture between the University of Western Australia and the Committee for Perth, an influential member-based organisation driven by a diverse assembly of Perth's leaders. Members collaborate with business, government and community groups to actively improve the liveability of our city, resulting in a real and enduring contribution to Perth and the metropolitan area.

One of the only broad-reaching projects of its kind to be undertaken in the southern hemisphere FACTBase condenses the plethora of databases and studies on the subject of liveability and analyse what's happening in Perth through words, maps and graphs.

All FACTBase bulletins are available for download on the Committee for Perth website at <http://www.committeeforperth.com.au/research>.

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